

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COTONO 00439 041254Z

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SY-05

OC-06 CCO-00 OPR-02 A-01 CPR-01 MCT-01 PC-01 AID-05

SCS-03 SCA-01 DHA-02 PER-01 EUR-12 EA-07 IGA-02 EB-08

AGRE-00 COME-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 /120 W

-----041301Z 021479 /45

O R 041110Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9459

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0439

ACCRA ALSO FOR RCO, NIAMEY FOR RDO

DEPT ALSO FOR AID/AFR/SFWA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, PINT, DM, US

SUBJ: BENIN ANNOUNCES INTENTION IMPOSE STRICT INTERNAL SECURITY
MEASURES

1. GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) MARCH 3
ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO IMPOSE DRASTIC TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS ON
ALL FOREIGNERS, INCLUDING DIPLOMATS, IN BENIN. ACCORDING TO
STATEMENTS ISSUED IN MARCH GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED DAILY EHUZU
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 COTONO 00439 041254Z

AND ON NATIONAL RADIO PREVIOUS EVENING, COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAS
DRAWN UP DECREES REGULATING THE TRAVEL AND LODGING OF ALL
FOREIGNERS IN THE COUNTRY. DIPLOMATS WILL BE RESTRICTED TO
CITY OF COTONOU (CITY LIMITS UNDEFINED) AND MAY LEAVE ONLY WITH
AUTHORIZATION OF BOTH MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MINISTER
OF INTERIOR. OTHER FOREIGNERS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANTS, A TERM
WHICH HAS ALSO NOT BEEN DEFINED, WILL BE REQUIRED TO HAVE

SIMILAR AUTHORIZATION AT DISTRICT OR PROVINCE LEVEL IF THEY WISH TO LEAVE CITY OF RESIDENCE OR AREA OF JOB ACTIVITIES. LODGING OF FOREIGNERS WILL BE RESTRICTED TO OFFICIAL RESIDENCES, HOTELS OR HOUSES REGULARLY ASSIGNED FOR THAT PURPOSE, I.E., BENINESE CANNOT HAVE FOREIGN HOUSEGUESTS. LODGING OF ALL VISITORS AND RESIDENT FOREIGNERS, PRESUMABLY OUTSIDE OF COTONOU, MUST BE AUTHORIZED BY TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATORS (VILLAGE DELEGATES, COMMUNE MAYORS, DISTRICT CHIEFS, PROVINCE PREFECTS).

2. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN TEXT OF DECREES NOR HAS THEIR EXISTENCE BEEN OFFICIALLY COMMUNICATED TO US BY GPRB, THEY APPEAR TO BE LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF GPRB PARANOIA FOLLOWING JANUARY 16 MERCENARY ATTACK. INTERIOR MINISTRY, MOREOVER, HAS LONG WANTED THIS SORT OF TOTAL CONTROL OVER FOREIGNERS, BUT UNTIL ATTACK HAD NO PLAUSIBLE GROUNDS FOR SETTING RESTRICTIONS.

3. IF ACTUAL DECREES TURN OUT TO BE AS RESTRICTIVE AS ADVANCE BILLING SUGGESTS, WE SHALL FACE SEVERAL SERIOUS PROBLEMS. FIRST IS CONSULAR ACCESS TO AMERICANS (PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS AND MISSIONARIES) LOCATED THROUGHOUT COUNTRY. AS DEMONSTRATED BY TREATMENT OF CRO DAVIS AND CONSOLINI CASE, BENINESE HAVE LITTLE RESPECT FOR PRINCIPLE OF ACCESS. VOLUNTEERS HAVE ALREADY EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTIES FROM LOCAL OFFICIALS ABUSING POWER. IT WAS ONLY BECAUSE WE HAD ACCESS TO THEM THAT WE WERE ABLE TO BRING SEVERAL TERMINATING VOLUNTEERS TO COTONOU FROM THEIR VILLAGES WHERE THEY WERE UNDER A FORM OF HOUSE ARREST. IN ANOTHER INSTANCE A FEMALE VOLUNTEER WAS PHYSICALLY HARRASSED BY HER DISTRICT CHIEF. HAD THE PEACE CORPS NOT BEEN ABLE TO TAKE HER
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 COTONO 00439 041254Z

OUT OF THE VILLAGE, SHE COULD HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO SERIOUS PHYSICAL ABUSE. GIVEN THE MARKED INCREASE IN ANTI-WHITE PROPAGANDA IN LOCAL LANGUAGE RADIO BROADCASTS AND SIGNS OF ITS HAVING AN IMPACT ON THE BENINESE, THE THREAT TO AMERICANS IN OUTLYING DISTRICTS BECOMES EVEN GREATER.

4. SECOND QUESTION WILL BE HOW EMBASSY AID CAN CARRY OUT NORMAL FUNCTIONS IF OFFICERS MUST HAVE SPECIAL PERMISSION EVERY TIME THEY LEAVE NARROW CITY LIMITS OF COTONOU. IN VIEW OF THE GPRB'S USUAL PRACTICE OF DELAYING ACTION BY SAYING THAT THEY ARE WAITING FOR CONCURRENCES OF INTERIOR MINISTRY, WHICH WHEN APPROACHED, REFERS US TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS AS THE PROPER CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION, EMBASSY OFFICERS WOULD EFFECTIVELY BE IMMOBILIZED.

5. FRENCH AMBASSADOR (DEAN OF DIPLOMATIC CORPS) HAS ASKED TO HAVE MEETING WITH ALL RESIDENT CHIEFS OF MISSIONS ON MARCH 8 TO DISCUSS JOINT APPROACH TO GPRB CONCERNING CLARIFICATION EXCEPTIONS, LAISSEZ-PASSERS, ETC. WHILE THIS IS SENSIBLE COURSE OF ACTION, FRENCH AMB IS NOT KNOWN FOR HIS CAPACITY TO STAND UP TO

GPRB AND, IF MEETING IS ATTENDED BY OUR SOVIET, CHINESE, AND NORTH KOREAN COLLEAGUES, HE IS LIKELY TO BE EVEN LESS FORCEFUL.

6. FOR OUR OWN PART, WHEN TEXT OF DECREES IS MADE PUBLIC, WE PROPOSE MAKING WRITTEN DEMARCHE TO GPRB SEEKING, IN ADDITION TO PRIVILEGES OF ARTICLES 25 AND 26 OF VIENNA CONVENTION, GPRB'S SPECIFIC GUARANTEES OF UNRESTRICTED CONSULAR ACCESS TO ALL US CITIZENS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY, OF PEACE CORPS TO HAVE UNIMPEDED ACCESS TO VOLUNTEERS AND VICE VERSA, AND OF EMBASSY TO HAVE UNIMPAIRED MONITORING CAPABILITY FOR EXISTING AND FUTURE AID PROJECTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THESE SHOULD BE MINIMUM CONDITIONS ACCEPTABLE IF WE ARE TO MAINTAIN ANY SIGNIFICANT OFFICIAL US PRESENCE IN BENIN AND CARRY OUT AN AID PROGRAM. LATTER IS PARTICULARLY TIMELY ISSUE SINCE BENINESE APPARENTLY ARE ATTACHING GREAT IMPORTANCE TO PL 380 TITLE II CORN SHIPMENT. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMINISTERING PROGRAM
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 COTONO 00439 041254Z

(E.G., END-USE CHECKS) COULD GIVE US LEVERAGE IN ESTABLISHING PRINCIPLE OF ACCESS IN ALL AREAS OUTLINED ABOVE.

7. BELIEVE THAT IF DECREES PROMULGATED, SERIOUS CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO RAISING POSSIBILITY EXERCISING PRINCIPLE OF RECIPROCITY WITH AMB BOYA.

8. REQUEST COMMENTS BY CLOSE OF BUSINESS MARCH 7 IN TIME FOR LOCAL CHIEFS OF MISSION MEETING.
THOMPSON

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